



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 12
Number 1

Article 5

10-15-1985

Quenti Lambardillion: A Column on Middle-earth Linguistics

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Recommended Citation

Hyde, Paul Nolan (1985) "Quenti Lambardillion: A Column on Middle-earth Linguistics," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 12 : No. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol12/iss1/5>

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Abstract

Discussion of transcription of “Bombadil poem” reproduced in 1978 *Silmarillion Calendar*, and what it reveals about the orthography of the writing system used and the differing dialects represented.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Languages

λ ι ε ρ ρ 2 n j c ρ ρ
h i s b o o t s w (e)r(e) y e l(1) o w
46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58

λ ι ρ ι β ρ ρ ρ ρ u ρ n λ ι ρ
h e l i v (e)d d o w n u n d (e)r h i l(1)
59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73

ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
and a p e a c o (c)ks f e(a) th (e)r n o d(d)
74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87

ι ρ ι ρ λ ι ε ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
(e)d i n h i s o l d h a t t o s(s)
89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103

ι ρ ι ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
i n g i n the w e(a) th (e)r . th e
104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115

ρ λ ι ε ρ ι ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
r(e) h i s b e a r d d a n g l e d
116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128

ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
l o n g d o w n i n t o the w a t
129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142

ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
(e)r : u p c a m(e) g o l d b e
143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155

ρ ι ρ ρ ι β ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
r(r) y the r i v (e)r w o m a n s d a u
156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168

ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
(gh)t (e)r ; p u l(1)(e)d t o m s h a
169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180

ρ ι ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
n g i n g h a i r r - i n h e w e
181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194

ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
n t a w a l(1)w o i n g u n d (e)r the w
195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207

ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
a t (e)r l i l i (e)s a b u b(b) l
208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220

ι ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
i n g and a s w a l(1)ow i n g . ' h e y
221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234

! ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
! t o m b o m b a d i l , w h i
235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248

ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
th (e)r b e y(o) u g o i n g ' s a i
249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260 261

ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
d f a i r g o l d b e r(r) y . ' .
262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275

ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
b u b(b) l(e)s y o u a r(e) b l o w i n g
276 277 278 279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288

, b ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
, f r i (gh)t e n i n g the f i n(n) y
289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301

β ι δ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
f i sh and the b r o w n w a t (e)r
302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314

ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
r a t , s t a r t l i n g the d
315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324 325 326 327 328

ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ ρ
a b ch i (c)ks , d r o w n i n g
329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340

There is much that could be said about the transcription, especially by comparison with the other two pieces. Leaving that aside, however, there are three oddities which substantiate the purposeful use of metathesis (as mentioned above) and the deliberate use of phonetics in writing to depict character.

The first involves the use of "w-following", which is generally used to form falling diphthongs. In #225, the diacritic is attached to the character transcribed as "s" in order to produce "sw" in "swallowing". The seemingly unusual usage is in the word "wallwoing" (#197-#202) where the "w-following" diacritic is superscripted above the "l". It is obvious that this word is "wollowing" and is so written by Tolkien in his English text of the poem (*Adventures*, p. 11). However, the word "wollow" in the *OED* has several fourteenth century variants which have the "w" following the "l". Again, the appeal to a beloved linguistic (and literary) time through a simple, yet academic way.

The second oddity has to do with "bubbling" (#217-#222) and "bubbles" (#276-279). Although the words are substantially the same, particularly in the root syllable, the root vowel is written differently in each and, thus, is to be pronounced differently; /u/ in #218 and /u/ in #277 (compare #146 and #254 for the phonetic value of #277). The problem is solved when it is noted that the word "bubbling" is in the voice of the narrator of the poem and "bubbles" is a quote from Goldberry's actual dialect. The third oddity has to do with Goldberry's dialect specifically. When she says "you" followed by a word with an initial stop, the vowel is /u/ (#254); when she says "you" followed by a word that is vowel initial, the vowel of "you" is /uw/ (#291). Who would have thought of that? Why, J.R.R. Tolkien, of course.

There is one seemingly inexplicable orthographic element in the transcription. In #184-#186, the word "hair" is phonetically represented. Character #186 is the character used for retroflex "r", but it is immediately followed by #187 which is a trilled "r". Why there are two "r"'s represented is difficult to say, as the *OED* provides no immediate answer. I might offer one speculation. "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil" was undoubtedly written to be read as a rather comic piece, one appealing to the ear of the audience (*Ibid.*). Tolkien says that the Hobbits were fond of strange sounding words and metrical tricks. The trilled "r" in context is at the very point where Goldberry is pulling Tom by the beard into the water, almost as if the long trill were meant to onomatopoeetically represent Tom's startled consternation as he is suddenly and rudely awakened by his tumble. The trilled

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expanding upon this idea, Lewis explains, "my children's stories are the real side-chapels, each with its own little altar." (p. 3) Exactly. These works are chapels which invite the reader to worship God who is revealed in them. And every one of the letters in Letters to Children is a little gift of the love of God, of His creation and of humankind, laid in the hand of each child. And since we have been told to become as little children, this book is a gift for the rest of us too.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

Switches and Ashes

John Beversluis, C.S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 182 pp.

As waspish a work as it has ever been my disagreeable task to review, this book seems bent upon presenting its readers with stones instead of bread. It must be written from some very specific point of view, and the author evidently desires to persuade his reader of the truth of that viewpoint. He is so very modest, not to say secretive, however, that one is left with the impression that his real goal is pure Lewis-bashing. I think the author wants to persuade us that it is totally irrational to believe in God for rational reasons. I am not quite sure what he thinks it is rational to believe in. Quite possibly he believes that it is in fact irrational to believe in God, or perhaps that only an irrational belief will do. In any event, he creates the impression that Lewis recommended Christian faith exclusively on the basis of human reason. To support this odd point of view he must of course leave out all of Lewis's mythopoetic works with the exception of his early and allegorical The Pilgrim's Regress, admittedly Lewis's least eirenic work. But even a reading confined to his apologetics does not confine Lewis to reasoned argument only. It is the image, breath-taking, heart-breaking, vision-making, which in the end persuades us: I concede that willingly. Not that Beversluis would approve of this, of course.

In the process of demolishing Lewis's arguments by means of every weapon available including liberal use of the argument ad hominem, (wielded like a club when reason won't do the trick), such personal experience of the divine is ruled out too. Nothing Lewis says is acceptable, it seems. So what is left to us? Are we really expected to think that only a faith entirely devoid of reason will do? Evidently Beversluis thinks so, and as his final prooftext he offers A Grief Observed. Nothing like hitting your opponent when he is down! Lewis himself, Beversluis says, found his reasoned faith wanting in the face of brute bereavement, when the beloved wife of his old age died of a cruel cancer after a brief but glorious remission. As it happens, I have read A Grief Observed. Its voice is absolutely authentic. This is the very cry that was uttered upon the cross, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me!" Reason is not enough when the dark night of the soul descends. But nor is anything else. In the end, nothing is enough, not reason, not mysticism, not faith, not even revelation. Only God is enough. Lewis never really told us anything else.

But he was an intellectual, and he had read the biblical injunction to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And he was never ready

while he lived to leave any of these faculties out. Would Beversluis have it otherwise? He doesn't tell us. You are cautioned herewith about this book: it will very likely ruin your day, though the faith, including its reasoned elements will survive this author's efforts. On the other hand, maybe you like hair shirts!

Nancy-Lou Patterson

An Eirenic Spirit

John Randolph Willis, SJ, Pleasures Forevermore — The Theology of C.S. Lewis (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1983), 157 pp.

In a book which offers exactly what it claims, Father Willis sets forth chapter by chapter the theological premises which Lewis promulgated, on "God as God," "God as Creator," "Man's Problem: Man," "Jesus Christ and Redemption," "The Church and the Sacraments," "Scripture and Prayer," "Ethics," and "The Last Things." Readers will find this a clear, simply-expressed summary of formal Christian teaching as expounded by Lewis, together with a critique from a Roman Catholic viewpoint of a few areas of perceived deficiency in Lewis's presentation of these teachings. As a summary the book is fairminded; as a critique it will certainly be of interest to Roman Catholics. Surely nobody ought to be surprised to find that the Anglican Lewis is silent on the Primacy of the Pope and is unready to agree that "what makes the Roman Catholic Church unique is its living magisterium speaking authoritatively on matters of faith and morals." (p. 77) Anglicans think that they — and many, many others — share in that "living magisterium." Naturally it would be impolite to dwell upon the point in works of broad application: Lewis's genius at producing such works is attested by the fact that most of Father Willis's Pleasures Forevermore praises his efforts to teach faith. Lewis's appeal is deep as well as wide, and Willis presents it well. Lewis chose to teach in an eirenic spirit, and so has his commentator in this useful work.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

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"r" combined with a rising inflexion in the voice of the narrator would startle the audience as well, producing what the Hobbits would call "a fine jest". The similarity with the end of Frodo's rendition of "The Man in the Moon" (I, p. 172), I think, is no accident.

Again, we can justifiably ask ourselves the significance of all of this. We have demonstrated Tolkien's attention to detail before, but why buried deep in facsimiles of the written languages, cloistered away in an almost impenetrable places? The simplest view is that the detail shows up spontaneously, the product of an exacting mind. I for one, however, would like to believe that some of these delightful little gems are rewards, marks in some etherial grade book, a soft and pleasant voice saying "Of course! Of course! But that is not all; go on. Look, look, look!"

NOTES

[1] Samuel H. Scudder, "A Great Teacher's Method", cited in Bruce B. Clark and Robert K. Thomas, Out of the Best Books (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), pp. 42-45.

[2] George Allen & Unwin (Publishers) Ltd (London, 1977)